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## State's children rank low in well being

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After a decade of measurement and analysis, the grades are in: When it comes to the well-being of our children, Oregon earns a "C."

In its Report Card 2000, Children First of Oregon says the state is falling short of its own benchmarks.

For example, documented suicide attempts among teenagers remains higher than the 1990 rate.

In addition, only 18 percent of high school students have completed a school-related work experience program, falling short of the 65 percent benchmark.

Since 1991, Children First, a nonprofit, non-partisan group, has served as a voice for the state's more than 800,000 children:

"The lack of significant improvement on these key indicators argues for better investments to ensure the well-being of our most valuable asset, our children," said Marie Hoeven, executive director of Children First.

Research shows that Oregon has steadily decreased or shown no improvement since 1990 in the areas of childhood poverty, hunger, teen dropouts and juvenile arrests.

Other highlights of the Report Card include:

- Investment in Families: C minus. Child support collection is at 67 percent; no improvement since 1995. About 70 percent of low-income households spend more than 30 percent of their total income for housing.

- Safety: C plus. About 13.5 percent out of every 1,000 children are abused or neglected. More than 22 per 100,000 children ages 1 to 14 die before the age of 15.

- Education: B minus. About 56 percent of eighth-grade students meet or exceed state math standards. More than 6 percent of high school students drop out of school.

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- Early childhood: B minus. About 81 percent of babies are born to mothers who receive early prenatal care and 73 percent of 2-year-olds are up to date on their immunizations. Only 21 per 100 children (13 and younger) have available child care.

- Teen years: D. In one month, 26 percent of eighth-grade students drink alcohol; 19 percent of eighth-grade students use illicit drugs; and 20 percent of eighth-graders smoke cigarettes. Almost 16 out of every 1,000 girls, age 10-17, become pregnant and 209 youth per 100,000 attempt suicide.

"We need to invest smarter for Oregon's children to make this the last Report Card in which Oregon receives merely an average grade for child well-being," Hoeven said. "Our ability to achieve above average results depends upon evaluation of the spending of precious public and private dollars and on expansion of cost-effective efforts that raise the grade."

While Children First reports several negative trends, after 10 years, a few areas have improved for our children.

The number of children without health insurance has decreased by more than half; improvements in math and reading proficiency have met or surpassed the 2000 benchmark; and infant mortality rates have steadily declined.

For more information about Children First and Report Card 2000, go to [www.childrenfirst-foregon.org](http://www.childrenfirst-foregon.org).